

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 8, 2023

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Criswell:

We write to request that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) expeditiously approve disaster claims requested by the County of Santa Cruz for damages from the 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Fire (CZU Fire). In some cases, claims have been under consideration for over two years, causing significant cash flow problems for the County. Quickly approving these claims will allow the County to continue to recover from not only from the CZU fire, but also from the COVID-19 emergency and the recent winter storms.

The CZU Fire event burned over 86,000 acres, destroyed nearly one thousand homes, and forced over 77,000 evacuations in the area. This resulted in tens of millions of dollars damages and emergency spending, much of it eligible for FEMA disaster reimbursement.

However, slow approval of these claims has caused financial hardship for the County. Of the \$23.4 million in claims made by Santa Cruz County for the CZU Fire damages, only \$4.2 million has been obligated by FEMA and over \$14 million in these claims have been under consideration by FEMA for over two years. The County took out a costly \$48 million loan last year in order to meet its payroll obligations as they waited for FEMA reimbursements.

We are particularly concerned with an outstanding claim of \$8.7 million for hazardous tree and debris removal that has been in environmental review for over two years. While we understand and support reviews that ensure environmentally responsible cleanup and recovery, two years is an unimaginably long timeline.

We are sympathetic to the strains under which your agency has been operating while addressing a public health emergency on top of natural disasters and other events that did not stop during the pandemic. However, we also have confidence in FEMA's ability to distribute the funding it is provided by Congress in an expeditious manner.

In that spirit, we ask that you consider the already lengthy timeline for these reviews and recommit FEMA to paying CZU Fire reimbursements as soon as possible. Santa Cruz County officials and our offices stand ready to assist you in any way.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Panetta', with a large, stylized 'P' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Anna Eshoo', with a large, stylized 'A' and 'E'.

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress